

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURE OF THE MOMENT

built-in banquettes

NO LONGER RESERVED FOR RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS, PERMANENT
BENCHES MAKE ROOM FOR EVERYONE AT THE TABLE

FEATURE Keith Flanagan



Tucked into kitchen corners, banked along dining areas or nestled along pretty much any interior wall in need of a lift, built-in banquettes are one of the hardest working architectural features throughout interior design right now.

‘Banquettes are a great way to best maximise small spaces, both in terms of making enough room for a dining area in the first place, and making it as comfortable as possible,’ says Sam McNally, co-founder and director at London’s Echlin.

As casual alternatives to formal dining rooms and tables, they are a cosy spot for conversation or a cup of tea, be it morning, afternoon or night. But it’s a special balance between function and comfort that’s winning hearts.

A built-in banquette can change up your whole interior. It can anchor an open space with a new focal point. It can squeeze a dining nook into awkward rooms that wouldn’t accommodate a table with chairs on all sides. It can offer space for secret storage with hinged seats and hidden drawers.

And if the concept reminds you of a hotel or restaurant, why shouldn’t it? ‘We believe customers are increasingly looking for a way to get closer to the hotel industry’s atmosphere,’ says Florence Jallet, a co-founder of Paris’ Batiik Studio. After all, hospitality has a knack for luxe functionality. ‘It’s also about the feeling of the melding and meshing of commercial and residential – they are really morphing into one,’ adds Pittsburgh’s Leanne Ford.

While a built-in banquette is a shoo-in for modern kitchens with casual dining areas, you’ll find them throughout modern homes — here are a few tips and tricks for getting them right. ➤

1 DINE OUT

Today’s designs often find inspiration from the hospitality industry, allowing banquettes to embrace bigger and bolder looks that transport owners to their favourite dining destinations. ‘The built-in was a great way to take advantage of what would have otherwise been an awkward space in this home,’ explains designer Leanne Ford. ‘This was a fun project because we were designing for young parents, but the parents also loved to have fun, entertain, and go out – so they loved the idea of bringing the feeling of being out to their home.’

GET THE LOOK Project by Leanne Ford Interiors

2 SMOOTH OPERATOR

While straight lines are typical of bench seating, contemporary banquettes aren’t afraid to show off their curves. Along with the layout, the seat itself can be rounded out with cushioned upholstery, or designed with a sinuous shape to soften any harsh

angles, like in this pied-à-terre. ‘Paired effectively with a bespoke solid walnut and glass topped table by SI Gebene, the curved edges of the bench are echoed by the rounded wooden chairs by Carl Hansen & Son and Finn Juhl, creating a sense of fluidity,’ explains Thomas Vevaud of Paris’ design studio Le Berre Vevaud.

GET THE LOOK Project by Le Berre Vevaud

3 HOVER CRAFT

Tailor-made banquettes can achieve new heights in the style front that normal furniture simply cannot – for instance, their ability to eliminate legs altogether. In certain configurations, banquettes can float along the wall with hidden structural reinforcement. ‘In this case, the fact that the banquette is a corner one meant it really suited leaving out legs,’ says Florence Jallet of Paris’ Batiik Studio. ‘Floating banquettes are a trick to create a feeling of space by freeing up the floor area.’

GET THE LOOK Project by Batiik Studio





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4 ISLAND TIME

While built-in banquettes often occupy space along a wall, this dual-purpose island is an interesting way to pivot. 'In the kitchen, having the banquette built into the island saves space and avoids the island having a sheer face that would usually house bar stools, which are the default but not always needed in an open-plan space where there are plenty of places to sit,' explains Sam McNally, co-founder and director at London's Echlin. 'In this configuration a pedestal table is a must as it avoids the corner legs that make it difficult to get in and out of the bench area.'

GET THE LOOK Project by Echlin

5 GOOD SHAPE

As space-saving solutions, banquettes can accommodate a range of layouts, as simple as straight benches along walls or slightly more complicated constructions (think U-shapes and L-shapes) that transform a room's layout. 'In general it's best to take the room's footprint into consideration and then determine how many seats you're trying to accommodate,' notes Jennifer Bunsu, who chose a U-shaped design for a family with kids who needed seating all around the table. 'It's also important to have an idea of the table dimensions so you can be sure you have enough overlap.'

GET THE LOOK Project by Bunsu Studio

6 MATERIAL MATTERS

While upholstering a banquette creates a new canvas for bold fabrics, the chief concern is durability. It's the reason why restaurants often stick with easy-to-clean materials like leather that hold up to messy situations. 'Now there are durable versions of almost every material without sacrificing the look and feel,' explains New York-based designer Merve Kahraman, who chose a faux pink leather for her playful banquette seat. For upholstery that lasts, consider commercial grade materials, or dark and patterned fabrics that hide the inevitable splash of red wine.

GET THE LOOK Project by Merve Kahraman



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PHOTOGRAPHS (4) TARAN WILKHU; (5) NICOLE FRANZEN (BUNSA STUDIO); (6) OZAN BAL

